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Unravelling Scottish Evangelicalism
(Part One)

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INTRODUCTION

Is Scottish Evangelicalism unravelling? This fear was one reason for choosing 'Evangelical Ecumenicity' as the theme for the 2011 Scottish Evangelical Theological Society conference. Underlying the conference agenda was a perception that perhaps irreparable fissures threaten the Scottish Evangelical future.[1] Can Evangelicals overcome their apparent divergences and work together? The conference conveners invited the current author to open proceedings by unravelling the roots of what they identified as contemporary Scottish Evangelical 'polarization'.

There are indeed many knotted tangles of theological and ecclesiological yarns for an historian to unravel if the complex debates which rack contemporary Scottish Evangelical movement are to be understood in their proper historical context.[2] Charismatic and conservative, emergent and traditionalist, socially alert and separatist: when and where did these labels and the ideas which they represent begin to have purchase and power within the movement? The second instalment of this article will address this issue by surveying the issue of unity and fracture within the context of the historical development of Scottish Evangelicalism.

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[1]   The feeling is not, of course, new nor unique to Scottish Evangelicalism. The fear of Evangelical fragmentation has been looming over the movement for several decades across Britain, with repeated references to the 'tribes' into which the movement is alleged to have split. For an analysis of some of the more recent fracture lines within *English* Evangelicalism, see R. Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2007). For a broader consideration of British Evangelical identity from a variety of perspectives, see M. Smith, ed., *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present: Aspects of the History and Sociology of Evangelicalism in Britain and Ireland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2008).

[2]   For a summary of some of these debates, see G. Grogan, *The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints* (Leicester: IVP, 2010).

Before embarking on this survey it is necessary to pursue a somewhat different historical task; namely, to unravel the very ontology of Evangelicalism itself. If we are to understand why Evangelicalism today is a house divided it is important not only to look at the cracks in the edifice that have emerged over time but also to enquire about the original building materials. In particular, this article will contest that Evangelicalism has not declined from a pristine unity, but that it is in fact a movement that has always been in perpetual creative tension with itself. Explanations for Evangelical division therefore need to be sought not only in the specific historical divisions of the movement, but also in the very genetic code of the Evangelical coalition.

EVANGELICAL ESSENTIALS

American historian Douglas A. Sweeney has described Evangelicalism as 'Reformation Christianity with an eighteenth-century twist'.[3] The twist was Pietism, to which we will return later in this article. First, it is necessary to focus on the opening part of his definition. This reminds us that on central issues of salvation and scripture the Evangelical movement that emerged in the wake of the religious revivals of the eighteenth century added little to the axioms of the sixteenth-century Reformers.[4] Indeed the Protestant Reformers were themselves styled as 'evangelicals'.[5] The events of the eighteenth century associated with John Wesley (1703-1791) in England and Ireland, Howell Harris (1714-1773) in Wales, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) in Massachusetts, William M'Culloch (1691-1771) and James Robe (1688-1753) in Scotland, and George Whitefield (1714-1770), whose ministry was international, were an *evangelical* revival because they

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3   D.A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 24.

4   For a brief introduction to the eighteenth-century Evangelical revival in Britain, see: G.M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: UCL Press, 1998). The Scottish dimension to the revival is covered in J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and A. Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971). We lack a comprehensive history of Scottish Evangelicalism, although aspects of the movement are covered in the standard account of the movement in Britain: D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000).

5   Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 13ff.; A. Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xvi.

were a *Protestant* revival. These events were a revitalization of Protestant Reformers' central insights about the nature of salvation and the locus of Christian authority.

The sixteenth-century evangelicals of course believed that they were propounding nothing less than authentic Gospel Christianity. Their appeal to *evangelical* doctrine implied an attempt to recover the essence of the 'good news' about salvation as announced by the authors of the New Testament.[6] The Evangelicals of the eighteenth century continued and extended this quest for essential, biblical Christianity.[7] In pursuing this quest, they and their successors were blessed (or cursed) to live in an era of western history marked by the breakdown of traditional hierarchies and thus conducive to the establishment of new, experimental religious communities. The desire to embody evangelical essentials thus created not one but multiple expressions of evangelical Christianity.

This plurality may sometimes be resisted by Evangelicals because of their intuitive sense, due in part to the influence of eighteenth-century Common Sense philosophy over the movement, that evangelical truth is easily ascertained and that division is thus caused by an obstreperous refusal to agree upon what is self-evident.[8] There is, after all, only one Bible: should there not also be one version of biblical Christianity? This,

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6   Alec Ryrie therefore calls the Protestant Reformers 'Gospellers' (ibid.). The argument that the eighteenth-century revival needs to be contextualized as part of the broader history of evangelical Protestantism is a point made forcefully by many of the contributors to M. Haykin and K. J. Stewart, eds., *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008) = *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

7   'Evangelical' is being used from this point forward as a proper noun, referring to the network of Christians that emerged in the eighteenth-century and continue to this day. The lower-case 'evangelical' will refer to a broader, non-specific commitment to discovering and acting upon the gospel. Thus we can agree with Douglas Sweeney when he notes that 'Evangelicals... are [not] the only ones to whom the term evangelical applies' (Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, p. 24). This point is elucidated further as the argument of this article unfolds.

8   This was the eighteenth-century school of thought associated with a number of influential Scottish philosophers that asserted all humans have an inherent capacity to grasp ideas about natural and moral reality because the universe is intelligible: the way things appear to be to individuals are, in fact, the way they really are. Evangelicals were not common-sense realists in the sense of being explicitly part of a philosophical school, but such common-sense ideas have been commonly seen to undergirded elements of their worldview. On this, see: H. A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford

of course, misses the fact that faulty human interpretation refracts bibli-cal truth into multiple strands as a prism refracts light. More fundamen-tally, it fails to recognise that it is impossible for Evangelicals to break away from an environment in which pluralism reigns because this is the social-cultural context in which Evangelicalism was born and thrives. Pluralism is integral to Evangelicalism. Although Evangelicals might fre-quently lament the erosion of Christian values and mourn the rise of a type of religious relativism in modern society, these trends are actually symptoms of the same underlying culture that has given Evangelicalism its health and vitality. Evangelicalism was born as Christendom, with its totalising claims to be able to define and coerce subscription to a uniform body of Christian truth, lay dying. Evangelicalism's inherent theological insistence that individuals must decide *personally* for Christ is perfectly matched to the characteristically modern insistence on religious non-compulsion.

Evangelicalism is thus a culturally-conditioned (and thus culturally successful) version of Christianity that by very definition resists hegem-onic confessionalism, and insists every bit as strongly as the rest of west-ern society that the only proper religious choices are one made freely by individuals without coercion from outside forces. However, *unlike* much of modern western society, Evangelicals have continued to insist that the search for definitive truth is vital and urgent, and to believe that such truth can be discovered. The combination of this urgent quest for evan-gelical authenticity with the congenital voluntarism of the movement produces a multifarious range of evangelicalisms, co-equal claimants to the title of genuine evangelical.

This tendency to ecclesiastical fracture in the quest for authentic and authoritative expressions of Christianity is often noted in regard to the Evangelical movement in the United States where, as Nathan Hatch has documented, an insatiable appetite for democratic, voluntaristic religious primitivism swept across the nation in the generations after the Revolu-tion.[9] The looming presence of the national Anglican and Presbyterian churches of Great Britain has obscured the fact that nineteenth-century British Evangelicalism was, in fact, as restlessly democratic as new as its more widely-studied American counterpart. This was particularly so in

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University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 96-100; Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 93-113.

[9]   N.O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).

Scotland,[10] a fact should perhaps come of little surprise to those who have seen in Scottish political culture a more advanced 'Enlightenment' view of the rights of the individual to choose her or his own destiny, but which may shock those used to pursuing their Scottish ecclesiastical history through the somewhat labyrinthine maze of Presbyterian hegemony. In the second part of this article it shall be shown how this splintering of the movement crystalized around a series of 'disruptions' in Scotland in the 1840s.

The desire for evangelical authenticity has led to the formation of many groups with the totalising aspiration to institutionalize 'evangelical' truth once for all. The names chosen for such groups—Brethren, Apostolic Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Faith Mission, Pentecostal, Gospel Hall, Bible Church, Evangelical Union—have often suggested that these are not really denominations so much as they are elemental, unadorned New Testament (that is, evangelical) Christianity. These groups have aimed for primitive evangelical simplicity but in reality merely added a further layer of complexity to the Evangelical landscape, a landscape already populated with individuals belonging to older denominations—Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists and Baptists—who felt the search for evangelical truth was better pursued from with their own confessional tradition.

New evangelical groups eventually turn into the establishment and thus prompt another round of renewal and reconfiguration. Because the Evangelical movement has always stressed the need for authentic of belief—that is, for 'real' or 'vital' Christianity over and against 'nominal' or 'dead' faith—older generations of Evangelicals have, often unfairly, themselves become examples to younger Evangelicals of the ossification of tradition. Evangelicalism has always encouraged its young to break through this fossilization with a new vision of evangelical truth. Sometimes the children have broken rank completely, but often they rattle the cage just enough to prompt fears of crisis before themselves settling down to inherit the mainstream.[11] We lack a detailed study of this phenomenon, but its most well-studied occurrence was in the 1820s when younger Scottish and English Evangelicals launched a searing critique on the religious complacency of their parents' generation. A similar generational shift was

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10   This is one of the underlying themes of N.T.R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland 1838-2000: A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), esp. pp. 25-7.

11   For the phenomenon of Evangelical disillusionment, see D. Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

clearly evident in the 1960s Charismatic renewal movement and is perhaps again occurring in the theological and ecclesiological innovations of the emergent church. Such processes are disturbing, but they have also allowed the movement great flexibility and inventiveness. Evangelicalism has a self-regenerating gene. Evangelicalism is forever young. This is perhaps one reason that the movement has poured lot of time and energy into youth work, and also why some individuals who have grown up within the movement criticize it for its juvenility.[12]

THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Living as part of such a restless, multi-faceted movement has always led Evangelicals to the same question that prompted the conference to which the content of this article was originally addressed: can we stay together? Is the Evangelical movement dissolute? Victorian social reformer and Evangelical leader Lord Shaftesbury famously lamented in his old age: 'I know what constituted an Evangelical in former times ... I have no clear notion what constitutes one now.'[13] The temptation in such moments of uncertainty is to try to shore up the boundaries of the movement. What is authentic Evangelical belief? What is an Evangelical? Do new trends and fashions really count as being Evangelical? Such questioning tends to lead to the proffering of definitions reveal more about what the current interlocutor *desires* Evangelicalism to be rather than what it has actually been.[14]

Of course, if its definitions we want then there is no shortage.[15] The purpose of this current essay is not, however, to establish a working definition against which all subsequent deviations can be measured but rather to problematize the attitude of those who interrogate Evangelical history for explanations of its current polarizations. The fact that Evangelicals and observers of Evangelicals are troubled and perplexed by the question of Evangelical disunity in fact reveals as much about the nature of the movement as the actual study of its particular divisions. This is because the question, 'why are Evangelicals divided', actually speaks volumes about the *success* of Evangelicalism, rather than its failure. It reveals that Evangelicalism has been so good at projecting a coherent self-identity that the cracks in its edifice demand serious explanation. And yet the question really should be not 'why are Evangelicals divided' but rather 'why are

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12   For example, see P. Ward, *Growing Up Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1996).
13   Quoted in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3.
14   Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, p. 5.
15   Ibid., pp. 2-5.

Evangelicals united?', or perhaps even more fundamentally: 'Why are we convinced that there actually *is* a thing called Evangelicalism at all?'

As we have already outlined, *evangelical* (with a lower-case initial) describes a common disposition to establish religious faith and practice based solely on the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But it does not itself define precisely what those beliefs and practices should be beyond a basic affirmation that what Jesus said and did is vital to understand and act upon. Now, if we accept this to be the meaning of evangelical then we need to say nothing further about disunity, because clearly the particular bits of the New Testament that are thought to be of essence of the Gospel can and do vary between individual evangelicals. For example, thirteenth-century Franciscans pursued 'evangelical poverty' in fidelity to their understanding gospel priorities, but few would call this priority *evangelical* today.[16] But we mean more than this basic attitude towards scripture when we speak of Evangelicalism, with an upper-case initial. We feel it is concrete and defined; we expect a certain steadiness and consistency; we even feel it should have doctrinal unity and are alarmed when it appears to bristle with disunion. Why?

Here we can follow the lead of American historians Frank Lambert and Susan O'Brien, who, in seeking to explain what was new and distinctive about the Evangelical movement in the eighteenth century have each drawn attention not so much to innovative beliefs, but to rather to the rise of an Evangelical imagination.[17] From their work, we can conclude that Evangelicalism can be said to have been 'invented' in the eighteenth-century.[18] It was (and remains) an 'imagined community'.

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[16] In fact, many Franciscans objected to the claim even at the time and a deep rupture in the movement emerged: but we have enough to worry about without exploring *this* evangelical polarization as well!

[17] F. Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). This section also draws on S. D. O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 811-32.

[18] We must also note in passing the argument of D. G. Hart who, talking mainly about the American scene, claims that Evangelicalism was actually invented in the twentieth century by scholars (including historians such as George Marsden and Mark Noll) and Protestant leaders (such as Carl F. H. Henry) who wanted to distance late-twentieth century conservative Protestantism from its early-twentieth century Fundamentalist militant separatism and justify the study of Evangelicalism as a discrete topic of scholarly enquiry. D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Evangelicalism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). Simply put, Hart argues that 'Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist' (Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, p. 16).

This latter phrase is an allusion to historian Benedict Anderson's description of the emergence of *national* identity during the eighteenth century.[19] In his book of the same name Anderson described the way in which during the women and men unknown to each other, from a variety of locations, came to feel affinity with one another through the growth of capitalistically-funded vernacular print media (such as newspaper), an erosion of traditional sources of authority which promoted the need for the individual, increasingly responsible for determining her or his destiny, to construct a new legitimising sovereign community, and the emergence of a common language that generated a shared national discourse. Thus national identity was born. The parallels with Evangelicalism are obvious enough.[20] Evangelicalism also relentlessly exploited print media in order to share stories of revival and conversions, thereby linking up remote localities to a broader network; it appealed to the individual's desire for control of her own destiny by diluting a focus on the sovereign election of God and urging her or him to make a decision for Christ but simultaneously provided protection against the possible anomie and dislocation that this new situation generated through its projection of a unified Evangelical community; and it was shaped by the development of what nineteenth-century critic John Foster called the 'Evangelical dialect', a shared set of discursive protocols that intimated religious fraternity and transmitted religious affectation even between strangers.[21]

I disagree with Hart, first because he fails to note earlier examples of the use of the term Evangelical (especially in Britain) and second because, although it is true that Evangelicalism is an imaginative construct, this does not make it a falsehood that ought to be disregarded; rather it is precisely what gives it the movement power and purchase. In fact, it makes it *more real* and capable of summoning great loyalty, just as people have fought wars for their 'nation', which is also an 'imaginative construct' if we follow Benedict Anderson's argument. Hart does, however, raise an important point concerning the extent to which individuals in the past would have actually described themselves as 'Evangelicals' rather than by their denominational title, or by some other term such as 'Revivalist'. His argument begs for further research on the actual use of terminology by individuals who have by common consensus been assumed to have been part of the Evangelical movement.

19 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verson, 1991).

20 Anderson himself has no particular interest in the movement and in fact associates the rise of nationalism in part with the waning of religion, by which he means uniform, hegemonic confessionalism.

21 In fact, the emergence of Evangelicalism was not simply a *parallel* to the emergence of nationalism, but could be construed as interwoven with it, particularly with its strong anti-Catholicism that fed into the type of Protestant national identity identified by Linda Colley in her *Britons: Forging the Nation*

This argument can be illustrated particularly well by reference to the early origins of Scottish Evangelicalism during the 1742 Cambuslang Revival, an event commonly viewed as the major manifestation of Evangelical revival in Scotland. What was significant at Cambuslang was *not* that it was the first revival movement in post-Reformation Scotland. There had been a revival at Stewarton in 1625, at Kirk of Shotts in 1630, at Obsdale in 1675. Each of these movements were local renewal movements, led by the local minister, beginning on the Monday thanksgiving service after the quarterly Communion, and lasting for a protracted period of time.[22] The Cambuslang Revival could have been another such Presbyterian communion season renewal movement. What was new at Cambuslang was therefore not so much the revival itself but the act of imagining that events just south of Glasgow were actually constitutionally connected with events in Wales, England, and New England; the belief that there existed a religious community of shared experiences that transcended locality. This act of imagination here (and parallel acts elsewhere) turned local renewal movements into the international Evangelical revival movement.

This imagination was manifested in several ways at Cambuslang. First, the presence at two of the largest communion meetings of George Whitefield, the international celebrity preacher, added a broader dimension to the local revival, joining it up to religious excitement in other parts of Britain and the New World and infusing it with global significance. Whitefield made fourteen more visits to Scotland, along with frequent trips to America and other parts of the British Isles. The force of his personality helped fashion a new, multi-national religious movement.[23]

Second, William M'Culloch, the minister of Cambuslang, deliberately cultivated aspiration for revival based on his knowledge of global renewal movements. His pre-revival sermons were rooted not only in scripture

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1707-1837 (London: Pimlico, 1992). For further discussion of Foster, see M. Spence, 'John Foster and the Integration of Faith and Learning', *Christian Scholar's Review* (2012/13), *forthcoming.*

22 K. S. Jeffrey, *When the Lord Walked the Land: The 1858-62 Revival in the North East of Scotland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002). For a broader discussion of the contribution of the Scottish communion season to Evangelical revivalism (particularly in America), see L. E. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

23 On Whitefield in Scotland, see H. Stout, 'George Whitefield in Three Countries', in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies in the Popular Protestantism of North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1900,* ed. by Mark A. Noll and G. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 58-72.

but by reading from accounts of another religious movement, the account written by Jonathan Edwards, the Massachusetts pastor, of revival in his own New England parish, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737). Edward's account in itself signalled something new: the deliberate dissemination of news about revival in order to inspire a confidence that God was working worldwide through parallel events.[24]

Third, as the 'Cambuslang Wark' developed, M'Culloch and other Scottish revivalists displayed a self-conscious reflexivity in publicising revival in their own corner of the world to an international audience. M'Culloch, following Edwards' forensic technique of plotting the contours of the events in his parish, interviewed 110 of the converts at Cambuslang to attempt to narrate what made a revival. James Robe (d.1753) of Kilsyth published his own *A Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of One Spirit of God at Kilsyth and other Congregations in the Neighbourhood* (1742) followed the next year by *A Short Narrative of the Extraordinary Work at Cambuslang*.[25] Meanwhile, in his *The Signs of the Times Consider'd* (1742), John Erskine (1721–1803), minister at Kirkintilloch, argued that events at Cambuslang must be interpreted as part of a wider move of God which signalled the onset of the millennium.

Finally, the Cambuslang preachers made Glasgow into one of the hubs of Evangelical publishing for reporting news of not just Cambuslang, but the whole worldwide revival. William M'Culloch published the *Glasgow Weekly History*, which used syndicated articles from the parallel London journal, edited by John Lewis. James Robe provided a monthly digest, *Christian Monthly History*, published from Edinburgh. As John Balfour from Ross-Shire wrote to Robe, 'It is a choice Means to promote the Communion of Saints upon Earth.'[26] Scottish revivalists also began a 'Correspondent Meeting', where news of the revivals would be read. In the 1750s numerous Scottish evangelicals held a 'Concert for Prayer', the object of their intercessions being further revival, a code word that came to summarise the common aspirations of these new Evangelicals.[27]

The viability of such a self-conscious Evangelical network was, and continues to be, predicated on mutual recognition and self-authentication. If not quite 'secret handshakes', what makes a true Evangelical is partly determined by other Evangelicals who confirm the testimony and spiritual vocabulary of other individuals or groups and thereby bestow Evangelical identity upon them. And of course it is not one magisterium

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[24] Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, p. 161.
[25] Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, pp. 187-9.
[26] O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community', p. 19.
[27] Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, pp. 229-31

making such decision, but rather a complex network of individuals and communities who can often diverge about quite who is 'sound', 'serious', 'saved', and 'solid', to use some of the code words that Evangelicals have deployed to authenticate each other.[28] This makes the movement's boundaries difficult, if not impossible, to draw in any objective way, and it precipitates a complex and often sub-conscious set of decisions made in a thousand different ways by multiple Evangelical sub communities about who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

Evangelicalism is not therefore best not defined as a concrete set of theological beliefs, even though it certainly has a good number of these within its bounds, and several of which are extremely common. Rather, it should be understood as a 'transdenominational community with complicated infrastructures of institutions and persons which identify with "evangelicalism"'.[29] This means that non-theological categories, such as music used, festivals attended, language deployed, organisations belonged to—what we may, in short, call 'the Evangelical style'—can be as important in gluing people together as pure doctrine or theology. Dave Tomlinson, a trenchant critic of the faults of late twentieth-century Evangelicalism, observed that 'evangelicalism must also be understood in terms of its 'culture', or its social ambience.' It consists of 'an entire sub-culture of church service, events, festivals, concerts, conferences, magazines, books, merchandise, record companies, mission organizations, training schemes, holiday clubs and celebrities'.[30] Such bonds allow multiple opportunities for unity, but they also mean that serious theological gulfs can lurk below what appear to be the placid surface waters of the movement. Evangelicals are thus perhaps more surprised than they should be when they discover that, despite attending similar religious jamborees, singing the same Christian music, and consuming the latest Evangelical author, there are some serious issues of theological disparity between them. Fractures

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[28] Smith, 'Evangelical Identities', pp. 7-8.

[29] Marsden, quoted in Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, p. 31. According to the protocols used in this current article, the current author would have capitalized 'Evangelical' if these words were his own! The contention that Evangelicalism is best defined is as a connexional phenomenon is the central insight of Derek Tidball's *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994). See also T. Larsen, 'Defining and Locating Evangelicalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. by T. Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-14.

[30] D. Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 27.

within the movement can also be quickly solidified by the construction of subcultural protocols and the creation of sectarian media.[31]

This is the view of an historian of course, and not that of a theologian. This argument is not that Evangelicals themselves should be content to think that style and imagination are all it takes to be an Evangelical. To be Evangelical one must first be an evangelical: that is, one must be desirous to formulate a bold vision of what one believes to be evangelical—Gospel—truth. Evangelicals themselves will thus always be people who want to—and indeed, if they are to live up to their name, *must*—engage in robust debate about what constitutes evangelical doctrine and be convinced that getting this question right is an urgent priority. The sources to which one turns to form such doctrine and practice may vary (recently, for example the Early Church has emerged as a second source of theological interest alongside the traditional touchstone of the Protestant Reformation),[32] but Evangelicals will always be those for whom orthopraxis and orthodoxy *are crucially important*. Acceptance into the Evangelical coalition is based, in part, on the degree to which an individual or community shows this zeal. As Mark Smith has commented, evangelicals are united not on every point of belief, but rather on the presupposition 'that true doctrine can be held and that its holding is not an unimportant matter'.[33] This means doctrinaire liberal Protestants who doubt that unified truth can be found, or who are doubtful that it would have much relevance to the modern world even if it could, are *de facto* excluded. Neither should this argument be taken to imply that Evangelicalism is consequently a movement in which 'anything goes'. One of the binding forces of the network is certainly a core of commonly held tropes about what it means to be an authentic Gospel Christian.

It is being suggested, however, that the bestowal of Evangelical identity comes not through historians or other observers measuring individuals and communities against such a set of predefined characteristics (even if those characteristics have been assembled from listening to many Evangelicals speak), but rather by the self-determining authority of the Evangelical Leviathan itself, which silent yet ineluctably confirms or rejects constituents by relentlessly and almost impenetrably complexly subjecting them to its unspoken protocols of mutual appraisal and authentica-

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[31] This is the theme of P. Ward, 'The Tribes of Evangelicalism', in *The Post-Evangelical Debate*, ed. by G. Cray *et al*, (London: Triangle, 1997), pp. 19-34.

[32] G. Kalantzis and A. Tooley, eds., *Evangelicals and the Early Church: Recovery, Reform, Renewal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012); D.H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

[33] Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, pp. 3-4.

tion. Thus no outside observer (even a participant-observer acting as historian) can devise a definitional grid that successfully captures every evangelical within its bounds because this is simply not, historically, the basis upon which the question of who is an Evangelical has been resolved by the movement itself. The most that can be done is to describe the way in which Evangelicalism functions as an imaginative community of mutual affirmation (and mutual exclusion) before proceeding to describe the relative popularity of particular beliefs and practices within this movement on a case-by-case basis. Anything else ends up being misleadingly specific or frustratingly vague.

Reference must be made here to David Bebbington whose grid for defining Evangelicalism, the so-called 'Bebbington quadrilateral', has gained widespread approval. Bebbington argues that Evangelicals can be identified as those who have prioritized '*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross'.[34] When all four are found together, he contests, then you have found an Evangelical. Bebbington consciously devised this grid to render a hitherto underexplored religious movement as a legitimate object of professional historical study.[35] A meticulous empiricist, he assembled his master categories by listening to countless individuals and communities speak through the primary sources. 'You... have to have some supra-historical criteriology for determining who you are supposed to be studying,' Bebbington explained in an interview with Neil Dickson. 'The way to do that is through some model of characteristics built up over space and time which provides a common essential core.'[36] Bebbington's definition is thus a survey of popular Protestantism across three centuries intended to bound the story that he wanted to tell.

There is no doubt that his close attention to the sources has indeed yielded four incredibly common characteristics of the movement, hence his definition gaining such a large degree of approval. But his explanation of his methodology begs a question: how does Bebbington (or any historian of Evangelicalism for that matter, because no-one has proposed anything better!) decide which Evangelicals to poll in order to construct the

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[34] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3 (emphasis in original).

[35] This, incidentally, is the kind of act that D. G. Hart criticizes George Marsden and Mark Noll for performing American Evangelicalism history: he argues that they have imposed unity where none existed in history.

[36] 'Evangelical Historiography: An Interview with David Bebbington', *Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review* 3 (2005), 82-102, at pp. 88-9.

definition of Evangelicalism which will be used to decide who to include in a study of Evangelicalism?! In other words, do Evangelicals exist *prior* to the quadrilateral (or, indeed, to any alternative definition), or does the quadrilateral determine who are Evangelicals? Is there really a movement called Evangelicalism, or is D. G. Hart correct when he suggests that the movement is, in fact, a historiographical fiction?[37]

This is not a principled objection to the idea that Evangelicalism really exists: quite the opposite. But it is to suggest that the reasons for asserting that this is so have tended to rely on an intuitive hunch rather than proven thesis. Evangelical historiography (perhaps rather appropriately given the pragmatic bent of the movement), have been more interested in explaining what Evangelicals have *done* than pausing to probe the way in which the very fabric of the movement has been woven from the cords of language, memory, affiliation and imagination.[38] There is therefore a need for a great deal more historiographical attention to the constructed nature of the Evangelical community, and a need for more focus on the history of the *concept* of Evangelicalism as it has existed across history amongst the very people that we are claiming to have been Evangelicals. Have all so-called 'Evangelicals' believed themselves to be 'Evangelical'? What did they mean by this term? How did they express their affinity with other Evangelicals? What protocols have been essential in generating a sense of discrete Evangelical identity? Such a project would plunge us into deeply into a history of language and the constitutive role of imagination, thus fulfilling what Alistair Chapman and John Coffey have recently suggested ought to be the religious historian's 'principal obligation', namely 'to do everything possible to see things their way—to understand past agents on their own terms in their own contexts'.[39]

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[37] This is, in fact, the very question that prompted Frank Lambert's thesis (see n. 17 above). American historian of Christianity John Butler had proposed that the notion of a 'Great Awakening' was a fiction, invented by nineteenth-century historian Joseph Tracy. Lambert's reply was that it *was* indeed a fiction but one perpetuated not by historians but by the very eighteenth-century protagonists themselves. The act of imagination created a reality. This insight could be applied far more widely. See: F. Lambert, 'The First Great Awakening: Whose Interpretative Fiction?', *New England Quarterly*, 68 (1995), 650-9.

[38] The work of Lambert and O'Brien on the American Great Awakening identified above (n. 17) is the exception to this statement.

[39] J. Coffey and A. Chapman, 'Introduction: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion', in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. by A. Chapman, J. Coffey, and B.S. Gregory (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 1–23, at p. 16.

PIETISM

Sweeney refers to Evangelicalism as Reformation Christianity with an eighteenth-century twist. This 'twist' was pietism. It had a profound and ambiguous impact on the question of Evangelical unity. Pietism was orig-inally a renewal movement within German Lutheranism which proposed that 'real faith' was a matter of passionate experience of God rather than bald creedal affirmations. [40] Evangelicals absorbed the temperament of this continental European movement through literature and personal contacts. Evangelicals claimed that correct doctrine *about* Christ should be supplemented by a deep experience of Christ that would transform the emotional centre—the 'heart'—of the individual. The entry point into this 'vital' Christian experience was described by them as 'the new birth', a decisive turning point from nominal to dynamic Christian faith.

Pietism injected into the Evangelical movement a particular vocabu-lary for describing spiritual reality. Shared testimonies of personal con-version and on-going spiritual experience have been a force for unity. Indeed, Evangelical pietism, with its emphasis on personal testimony, fellowship and affection for Jesus, has been a key ingredient that substi-tutes for the lack of a publicly acknowledged Evangelical creed. In this sense a commitment to a pietistic spirituality is not just a particular belief that Evangelicals have happened to held in common; it is rather the very glue that has held together a movement which otherwise lacks any express basis for unity.

One of the distinctive dimensions of Evangelical pietism in regard to the question of unity within the movement is communal hymn-singing, a key pietistic innovation of the eighteenth-century revival. The shared

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[40]   The movement is particularly associated with Lutheran leaders Philip Spener (1635–1705) and August Francke (1663–1727). Noll, *The Rise of Evangeli-calism*, pp. 54–5; W. R. Ward, 'Power and Piety: The Origins of Religious Revival in the Early Eighteenth Century,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Univer-sity Library* 63 (1980), 231–52; G. Nuttall, 'Continental Pietism and the Evan-gelical Movement in Britain', in *Pietismus und Reveil*, ed. by J. van den Berg and J. van Dooren (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 207–36; J. D. Walsh, 'Origins of the Evangelical Revival', in *Essays in Modern Church History*, ed. by G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), pp.132–62, esp. pp. 148-53. Like Evangelicalism, one can use a capitalized term (Pietism) to refer to the official movement within its original central European context, or a low-case term (pietism) to refer to the broader set of attitudes associated with it. Evangelicals *did* have contact with Pietists but they also developed a parallel language and attitude that can also be broadly described as Evangeli-cal pietism. The lower-case initial will therefore predominate in this discus-sion.

expression of joyful faith and heartfelt devotion transmitted by hymns and songs, from Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* to the charismatic renewal music of the 1960s onwards, has allowed pietistic warmth to pulse through the fibres of the Evangelical movement and has probably been the single-most important factor in forming a common repository of Evangelical theological and Biblical knowledge. Hymnody has been the Evangelical catechism. Late-twentieth century Evangelical hymn writer Graham Kendrick notes that he sometimes has people approach him to exclaim: 'Graham, I found your song in the Bible!'[41]

All Evangelicals have been coloured with pietistic spirituality; all privilege a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ; all value profundity in worship. However, a kind of unqualified pietism that resists channelling personal experience through creedal categories has tended to chaff for those Evangelicals who have felt that vital Christianity must be pegged to classical doctrinal statements, particularly those of the Protestant Reformation. Pietism has thus been both the key imaginative bond between Evangelicals, but it has also injected one of the most fundamental tensions into the movement: orthodoxy versus orthopraxis. Radical pietists have generally resisted interpreting their experience of faith through historical-doctrinal categories because of a fear that dogmatics can shift attention away from the practical outworking of true faith and towards arid debates about abstract concepts. They have believed that actions speak louder than words. As count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-60), the German Pietist leader put it: 'there is less at stake in the concepts than the truth of experience; errors in doctrine are not as bad as errors in methods.'[42] However, a substantial body of other Evangelicals, generally from a Reformed position, have expressed concern the pietistic tendency dissolves confidence in a uniform body of truth into multiple configurations of experiential impressionism.

Critics of the piestic turn of Evangelicalism certainly have some reason for concern if maintenance of Protestant doctrine is admitted to be central to what it means to be an Evangelical. We shall see in the next instalment of this article that the pietistic emphasis within Evangelicalism has allowed the development of what we can for convenience call 'liberal' theological tenets among individuals who have nevertheless maintained a strong emphasis on zeal of devotion, personal prayer and a relationship with

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[41] G. Kendrick, 'Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)', at *The Official Graham Kendrick Website*, <http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/insight_story.htm> 8 May 2003.

[42] Quoted in A. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 121.

Jesus. This, in fact, is not surprising since both pietism and liberalism are products of the downplaying of dogma and the rise of the sovereignty of individual self-expressionism in the eighteenth-century. Thus Friedrich Schleiermacher, commonly lauded as the father of liberal theology, spoke with the accent of the Pietist faith of his upbringing when he wrote in his *Addresses on Religion* (1799) that religion 'is above all and essentially an intuition and a feeling... Religion is the miracle of direct relationship with the infinite; and dogmas are the reflection of this miracle'. Evangelicalism has often found unity by following this Schleiermacherian injunction. The privileging of a personal relationship with the Divine over against subscription to a creed has meant that many individuals have been able to fully participate in the Evangelical community while holding doctrinal convictions that depart in some significant ways from the Protestant confessionalism from which the movement originally sprang.

The tendency of Evangelicals to minimize dogmatic divergence in the name of shared love and experience of Jesus has meant that tectonic theological shifts can go for a long time undetected deep under the surface of the pietistic crust. These slowly moving plates eventually cause a fault line to emerge which can produce both on-going tremors and occasional major earthquakes (think, for example, of Rob Bell's *Love Wins* (2011) or Steve Chalke's *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2004)). Evangelicals feel surprised when such conflicts burst into the open precisely because pietistic unity has been so effective at downplaying dogmatic differences. This also makes them forget that none of these controversies are particularly new. For example, in 1867 the honorary Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, Thomas Rawson Birks (1810-1883), wrote a book called *The Victory of Divine Goodness* that caused a scandal in the Evangelical world because it suggested the reprobate would not be subject to eternal suffering. Aside from having three less words, even the very title this book prefigured the essence of Bell's 'radical' argument!

One further dimension of the contribution of Pietism to the Evangelical movement which arose in the eighteenth century was missionary zeal. This impulse was derived in particular from the Moravians, a lay community descended from the followers of Jan Hus (c. 1369-1415) in late-fifteenth century Bohemia. Fired by the Pietist conviction that the joy of experiential relationship with Jesus Christ ought to encourage individuals to share their faith with others, the Moravians established religious communities, orphanages and proselytising enterprises across Europe and the Americas. This evangelistic vivacity was widely emulated among British and North American revivalists. From field preaching to the foundation of international mission societies, Evangelicals poured time, energy and money into enterprises of proclamation and persuasion. In Scotland, such

organizations included the Scottish Missionary Society, the Glasgow Society for Foreign Missions, and the Scottish Bible Society. These agencies aimed for individual conversion and societal regeneration, but perhaps most of all hoped that mission would bring revival which would in turn bring about the eschatological dawning of the kingdom of God.[43]

An energetic commitment to the urgent business of evangelism has spurred on Evangelicals to unity on many occasions, often encouraging the downplaying of doctrinal or ecclesiastical disagreements. However, the relentless activism of the Evangelical movement and a desire to reach as many individuals as possible with the Gospel has again inflames the raw nerve of the movement's oldest and most difficult to resolve division: Calvinism versus Arminianism. The nerve is particularly raw in Scotland. We will return to this theme in detail in the second instalment of the article, but in brief, Calvinist groups have perceived a link between a pragmatic, business-oriented, market-place selling of Christianity and the rise of Arminian, free-will theology which appeared in the eighteenth century in association with Wesleyan Methodism, but burst into full blaze in Scotland in mid-nineteenth century revivalism. Evangelicalism, it seems to many Calvinists, focuses far too much on technique, persuasion, marketing and shallow sentimentalism, all of which reflect its downplaying of God's sovereign grace and election as well as its tendency to promote the salvation experience as a high-octane fillip for the individual, rather than as a sombre act intricately linked to the gravity of sin and the turning aside of God's wrath. Reciprocally, Evangelicals of either explicitly Arminian bent or of a pragmatic pietistic bent who do not see why theology should get in the way of evangelization, have shown impatience with the precisionist tendencies of Scottish Calvinists. 'O hair-splitting Scotland!' wrote the Arminian James Morrison in the mid-nineteenth century. 'How ridiculous does thy narrowness appear to liberal-minded men!'[44] This Reformed critique of Evangelical creedal laxity and shallow pragmatism, and the reciprocal Evangelical Arminian/ pragmatist critique of apparently obstructionist dogmatism has occurred

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[43] Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, pp. 116-59; A. Walls, 'The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context' in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. by B. Stanley (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 22-44; J.C.S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England 1760-1800* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2001).

[44] F. Ferguson, *History of the Evangelical Union* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morrison, 1876).

everywhere in the Anglophone world,[45] but Scottish Evangelicals may notice it much more than others because of the relatively high density of a distinctive and deeply culturally-embedded Protestant Reformed Christianity in a relatively small geographical space. An awareness of disunion is thus particularly acute.

This division is rooted not only in particular theological divides, but also in differing attitudes towards the value of ecclesiastical confessions in guaranteeing evangelical authenticity. This difference of opinion was evident during the Cambuslang Revival in relation to the Associate Presbytery, which had been formed after an exodus of ministers from the Church of Scotland in 1733 ostensibly on the issue of patronage but also with its roots in the so-called 'Marrow Controversy' of the 1720s. The Associate Presbytery has sometimes been dubbed the Scottish Methodists because of their commitment to Gospel Christianity; seceeder Ralph Erskine (1685-1752) was the person who had initially extended the invitation to George Whitefield to preach in Scotland. However, the leaders of the Associate Presbytery insisted that Whitefield agree to endorse only their voluntaryistic understanding of church government as defined by the Solemn League and Covenant. Whitefield replied with a typical Evangelical answer: 'I come only as an occasional preacher, to preach the simple gospel to all that are willing to hear me, of whatever denomination'. Ralph Erskine, obviously a believer in *evangelical* doctrines was dismayed at this response and henceforth declined to be part of the new Evangelical network, lamenting that, 'he [Whitefield] says he can refuse no call to preach Christ, whoever gives it'.[46] In other words, Erskine viewed his particular church polity as the only authentic protector of evangelicalism more than he cared for a free-wheeling, free market, non-dogmatic Evangelical project of which Whitefield was a part. As Scotland industrialized, urbanized and democratized, there was little question whether the creedal ecclesiasticism of Erskine or the free-market individualism of

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[45] Kenneth Myers, for example, gives a typical lament: 'Within the evangelical subculture, there has always been more concern with quick, practical solutions than with careful theological definition; more emphasis on personal testimonies than on apologetics; a tendency to interpret Christian experience in terms of a subjective "commitment to Christ" rather than as the life of faith as an elected gift of a sovereign God. Within evangelicalism, there is more regard for extemporaneous prayer than for creeds and confessions.' K. Myers, 'A Better Way', in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?*, ed. by M. Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 48. For a thoroughgoing critique, see Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

[46] Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*, p. 185.

Whitefield was going to be the more successful. This is the theme with which we will begin the second instalment of this article.

CONCLUSION

The genius of the Evangelical movement has been its ability to find a basis for unity beyond traditional ecclesiastical confessionalism. However, such unity has relied on alliances and affiliations rather than mergers and unions. The Victorian founders of the Evangelical Alliance, among who were counted several Scottish Evangelicals, recognized this fact when they announced at the founding meeting of the organization in 1846 that uniform subscription would not be required of members:

> That this conference, composed of professing Christians of many different denominations, *all exercising the right of private judgment,* and, through common infirmity, differing among themselves in the views they severally entertain on some points, both of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical polity, and gathered together from many and remote parts of the world, for the purpose of promoting Christian unions rejoice in making their unanimous avowal of the glorious truth that the church of the living God, while it admits of growth, is one church, never having lost, and being incapable of losing, its essential unity. *Not, therefore, to create that unity, but to confess it, is the, design of their assembling together.*[47]

It is clear from this statement that Scottish Evangelicals should not be surprised to find themselves wrestling with division, diversity or even 'tribalism'. Private judgement has privileged position within Evangelicalism. This makes it inevitable that the movement will live in a constant state of tension with itself, a tension that has been both creative and destructive. Lamenting that the movement has lost its pristine orthodoxy or hoping that a theological cold shower might solve its divisions fundamentally misunderstands the ontology of Evangelicalism. It has only lived and breathed because it has existed in a social-cultural setting of the kind that has valued personal liberty and religious competitiveness. Its members are freely-associating, self-determining groups. Such an environment has meant longevity and vitality for the movement as well as division and rancour. Evangelical diversity is both the movement's tragedy and triumph.

If the Evangelical movement in Scotland is unravelling it is not because of decay from a pristine doctrinal orthodoxy but rather because of a failure of the imaginative bonds that hold together a movement of

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[47] *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (January, 1846), p. 483 (italics added).

individuals associating with multiple Christian communities. However, given that one should expect a coalition to be constantly perplexed by how to bring unity from diversity, disagreements may not be a sign even of this kind of decay but rather an indication that Evangelicals are still fighting hard to discover and act upon what they believe to be evangelical truth. Therefore, if it is the Evangelical coalition we care about, we can conclude that it is probably when Evangelicals *stop* disagreeing with each other that there should be real cause for alarm. As Mark Smith has suggested, the existence of angst about how to define Evangelicalism is itself one of the characteristics by with the movement can be defined![48] Until such anxiety ceases, one should expect the coalition to survive, although individual affiliates may come and go.

If, however, it is not so much the fate of the coalition *per se* that troubles us, but rather the fact that multiple interpretations of evangelical truth that circulate within its bounds, it is necessary to heed the salutary warning of the Victorian Evangelical critic who, gently rebuking a recent proposal by some optimistic clerics for the foundation of a new all-encompassing evangelical denomination based solely on plain Biblical truth, reminded his readers that such a degree of unity was unobtainable. 'Divine ideas,' he wrote, 'are many sided and in their many-sidedness,—viewed in connection with their multiplicity, and their consequent susceptibility of indefinite combinations,—we find part of the reason why there are so many parties at present in the Christian church.'[49] When we remember this, we should probably celebrate that Evangelicalism has been the vehicle for so great a degree of ecumenicity and common purpose more than we should lament that it has failed to fully inaugurate a golden age of theological harmony.

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[48]   Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, p. 17.
[49]   *The Evangelical Repository* (4th Series), vol. 1 (1867), p. 67. The proposal under review was contained in the book *Unity of Creed, the Union of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: Elliot, 1866).